MARKETING ANALYSIS REPORT

Process

Three staff members of Alexandria met with the consultant on April 24, 2002 to discuss the operations of marketing services within the Alexandria Parks and Recreation Department. Interview with the staff were conducted in a focus group setting. The purpose of the meeting was to disucss marketing operations and areas for improvement. The department is doing many positive promotional tactics.

Methodology

Critical analysis in the area of Recreation Needs Assessment involves an understanding of the approach toward marketing the department and its resources toward a specific line of business.

Several respondents in the Focus Group study indicated they were unaware of the facilities and programs offered. This analysis is intended to evaluate the impact of the current marketing efforts and to develop recommendations to assist the department expand their exposure within the community

Summary

The marketing of the Alexandria Parks and Recreation needs improvement. The department does not have a marketing person designated to marketing the organization. The department relies on the public information officer from the city administration to assist in increasing awareness or promotions for park related programs and services. The department needs to centralize the marketing function and operations to increase effectiveness and consistency. The current approach is to have programming staff produce and market the programs. This is a more reactionary approach versus proactive approach.

A marketing plan for the entire department as well as each business unit marketing plans is needed. With the development and implementation of a goal oriented marketing plan, the department can begin to incorporate long term and short term strategies for the future.

Key Findings

The staff did state that they were in the process of creating a marketing plan, but with further investigation, the plan is really a set of guidelines for production of materials and distribution. It will help staff in standardizing some of the promotional efforts. From this meeting, the key issues and findings are as follows.

- Each division and center does its own promotions of programs and services.
- Marketing efforts are not coordinated due to staff not being assigned specifically to manage the marketing efforts.
- Cross promotions have not been explored in-house or with outside agencies.
- Marketing strategies are not fully developed or implemented. In several cases, the staff is reactionary in their approach to marketing due to limitations of time and resources.
- The staff could be better equipped with the appropriate technology (software and hardware) to produce their own in-house publications that go beyond the basic flyer. The process to get access to more advanced technology to produce higher quality

collateral pieces can be, in some cases, time consuming due to the many steps involved. The process could use some refinement.

- Time and resources are limited to track the effectiveness of any promotions.
- The distribution plans focus on schools and need to be expanded to target other audiences and age segments.
- The staff has to work through a PIO (public information officer) at city hall that selects programs or events they deem worthwhile to instigate more promotion.
- The budget is limited for marketing that covers only copying and mailing costs.
- Staff has yet to develop the in-house costs of creating flyers.
- Staff has not been exposed to opportunities for training in marketing strategies or methods to produce more effective promotions.
- Many methods are used in promotions.
- The website is not used to its fullest potential.
- Archives are handled separately and could use a more sophisticated program for handling the archives of the department (photos, scrapbook, videos, artwork).
- Very little in market research is done.
- Staff understands the purpose of having a good image, but find it difficult to develop image improvements, such as a unique logo, due to limited time and resources.
- Sponsorships are not pursued. Policies surrounding sponsorship development were not clear for programs other than youth and adult leagues.
- The staff are stretched to their limits in trying to manage multiple operations outside of their expertise and experience in regards to marketing. Marketing and registration are considered another task on top of many others. Many of the tasks are approached proactively, and much of what is accomplished is reactionary. There is little time for developing and implementing long-term marketing strategies.

The questions and responses follow.

1) How are the departments marketing efforts managed?

- There is no one person assigned to oversee this function.
- Each center or area does his or her own promotions or marketing.
- A marketing committee was established to deal with different areas and we are coming up with a plan. The plan will look at the processes, ongoing campaigns, customer service issues, etc.
- We would like to have a centralized marketing department to go to for our needs.
- There is a PIO in city manager's office that gets a calendar of events and will do some stuff for us.

2) What are the areas of responsibility for the marketing committee?
- Marketing committee is to get the word out to the various departments -- mission of how marketing will be handled and to develop consistency in publications.
- Look at the needs in customer services.
- Coordinate and organize marketing efforts.
- All of the staff on the marketing committee are committed to other things (their jobs), and then this is placed as part of it. It can be overwhelming.
- Not all of the staff in the Department know about the committee and its purpose.

3) What are the various promotion and advertising methods used by the Department?

- Brochure – 3 times, spring and summer, fall and winter; this is structured due to money and the blend of spring and summer programs
- Used to do a calendar of summer activities, beautifully done, could do again, but no money to mail
- Flyers for individual program
- Each center has monthly calendar and flyers
- Sports brochure
- Working on now – each center and program to have its own piece that would have a longer shelf life
- Website
- Public service announcements
- Photo opportunities to the PIO
- Often do our own photos and send into the PIO
- Public relations are sprinkled throughout – marketing committee is enhancing the concepts
- Workshop for staff on customer service
- No paid advertising
- Word of mouth

4) How are marketing efforts budgeted and planned?

- Brochure – printing, mail
- Only things budgeted for in marketing are photocopying and mailing and this is by section.
- Produce and photo copy can be done in-house if the quantities are small.
- There is a centralized mailroom at city hall that does the high volume copying.
- Flyer creation is not a problem
- Mailing costs absorbed easily within each section's budget.

5) How are efforts coordinated within the Department?

- Program plan has a piece on how it will be advertised.
- Example, citywide cheerleading competition – once approved, sent to papers, flyers, centers are advertised
- Trying to improve how flyers are displayed at the centers.

6) Are there marketing plans for the Department or by section/center?

- No
- We are working on one that will be department-wide and will be adaptable for each section and center. It is more like guidelines and the mechanics for producing materials.
- The goal is to have one marketing plan for the Department.

7) Are there distribution plans for promotional materials?

- School distribution
- Mail
- Recreation centers
- Libraries
- Special events – city hall, libraries, local businesses
- Some groups do better than others

8) Do you encourage or do cross promotions in-house or with other agencies?

- We haven't done that much.
- Many of the housing developments are self-contained. They have their own recreation areas and programs. We are losing ground with these people in attracting them to our programs. Also, much of the population is transient.

9) What technology do you use in house for marketing?

- Work on our own
- City has Corel and the department has Corel presentation.
- Microsoft Print Shop is on some of the computers.
- Basic programs, nothing specific for promotions and graphics
- Any software or hardware has to be approved by city IT.
- Calendar Plus is on some computers.
- The website is not up to date. We are not able to update our own information on our own centers. The information that is on the site is old and very generic.
- IT is not conducive to assisting the department in becoming more self-supporting to produce their own promotions and marketing materials.
- City does have a centralized office for graphics, but they have to do budget transfers pay for it.

10) Do you know the costs of marketing services?

- Central IT office does tell them how much it will cost to produce materials.
- Mailroom does the copy and charges back.
- There is a sub-object code in the budget for copying and print shop. This is kept the same each year. Staff can do a little juggling, but requests to add more money is a low priority.
- We do not track internal costs to produce something.

11) What type of training is available for marketing?

- Print Shop is not a city software, so there is no training. It's learning as you go.
- If it is a city-approved software, they do offer training.
- The rest is basically hands on with your supervisor on creating your own pieces, how many to copy, do copywriting and supporting graphics.

12) How are internal communication pieces handled?

- Monthly email newsletter that is from parks and is good.
- City has a bi-monthly newsletter that does include parks and recreation.
- We produce an annual report at the end of the year
- Some of the front line staff do not keep up to date, never going to have computer access for everyone. Making sure all get the information has to be a proactive approach by the supervisor of the area.

13) Does the department have archives and who is in charge of that?

- Not handled very well at all
- Poorly handled
- No historical documentation

14) Is there any standardization for information dissemination or image?

- There are some standards, but they are developed and implemented by each center.

15) Does the Department have a sponsorship program and seek out sponsorships?

- Not really, community organizations may support a program or the advisory council will run special events.
- Private/public sponsorships do exist in the sports programs. The leagues have sponsors.
- Joint ventures are handled by each center and the promotions include their names.

16) How is the image managed for the Department?

- The Department does not have its own logo. It is it the city's logo with the department name around it. If we wanted to develop our own logo, that would take some time.
- We have been able to develop taglines.
- The racks that have the flyers and brochures in each center are going to be upgraded and standardized to improve the image.

17) What is done in the area of market research?

- We do very little in the way of research.
- We do conduct program evaluations.
- Surveys for programs
- The Advisory Councils do give us feedback on what the community would like to see or have improved.
- We are responsive to complaints to the point that we massage it to no end. There is no tracking unless it was a complaint that generated an incident report.
- We have an "all eyes" approach in the city. There is one person in the Department assigned to handle citizen input related to stuff in the parks.

18) What would you like to see as goals for marketing of the Department?

- Create and have our own marketing department.

19) Any other concerns or comments?

- IT can be a barrier to using technology the way it was intended. As an example, so many departments have the game schedules and results on the web. Our IT makes it difficult to get things done and on the web. They speak in "computereez" and not in layman's terms. They can double our workload, or if they make it so difficult or too time consuming, it just won't be done.
- Our registration software is another problem, RecTrac. There is no one person who is dedicated to managing this program, training staff how to use its information, ensuring the integrity of the information, troubleshooting, using it to its full potential. This falls on each center staff to do registration, computer setup and data entry and this increases the workload.
- Each person in the department is very fragmented. Everyone is wearing too many hats and fighting for the same piece of pie.
- Information highway doesn't work. I'm not sure if we have been told or have we been told too much and it is not being absorbed.
- We are looking forward to the plan to help resolve these problems.